

DANIEL ELLSBERG AND TOM REIFER
MADMAN THEORY
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TRANSCRIPT

DE: Okay, what's this, the 17th? Or 18th?

TR: 18th.

DE: July 18th, Monday, with Tom Reifer.

TR: 2011.

DE: 11. 2011.

My undergraduate thesis was on theories of rational choice under uncertainty, the contributions of Von Neumann and Morgenstern, a large part of which was a critique, almost the only critique done in the economic literature of the Von Neumann-Morgenstern of two-person zero-sum games. That was in 1952. In ensuing years I was influenced in my thinking on bargaining and threats by two considerations. Tom Schelling's work, an essay on bargaining in the *American Economic Review*, had a major effect on my thinking for the rest of my life, and it was not in a formal abstract format but his reasoning about the requirements for making effective threats in actual bargaining, and the implicit context of his work was non-zero-sum games in which both parties could lose or both parties could win or the sum of their winnings and losings was not necessarily zero, as supposedly is the case in games like poker or chess or checkers where there's a winner and a loser. The assumption of zero-sum utilities is very questionable even for those games, but in most real-life bargaining situations both parties can be better off or worse off or some combination.

One of the particular concepts that he raised was the importance of a commitment situation that in which one party constrained his own capabilities or opportunities in order to influence the expectations of the other and make it clear that he might carry out, or he would carry out under certain circumstances, a threat which would prior to the commitment be regarded as making him worse off than before. It would hurt the other party but at some cost to oneself, possibly even a very high cost to oneself, and the problem of bargaining to a large extent is how to make it credible that you will actually do something if the other party does not comply with your demands or your offers that would under those circumstances be costly to oneself. Why would one carry out the threat that one has promised or threatened or warned that one would do?

There was also the work which was the other part of my undergraduate thesis, which was on the choice among gambles, among risky prospects, where the outcome of a particular action was not certain and could lead to a variety of outcomes with different likelihoods.

Now in the work in my thesis, which was largely on the utility aspects of this, I'm not going to go into all this in the book, the assumption was that the probabilities were known of the different outcomes, but just about the time that I finished my thesis, L.J. Savage came out with his book, *The Foundations of Statistics*, which was the starting point for most of my investigation in later years, and that proposed to measure the subjective likelihoods of different outcomes in a person's mind in terms of probabilities, but probabilities that were not objective and the same for every person or not provable or demonstrable. They corresponded to the betting odds at which a person would accept certain gambles or not, and as he said, a likelihood or a probability of one-third for a particular event meant that one would accept gambles that paid off two to one or more on that particular event, and that that was the meaning of assigning the probability one-third to that particular event, or one-half to an event where you would be equally willing to stake a particular prize on the occurrence of that event or on its nonoccurrence, equally likely, and that would be a probability of one-half.

Again, in the end, my own work was largely a critique of that theory, but it did point me in the direction of thinking of comparable or to some degree measurable differences in the probability of different events for a particular person, might vary from person to person, and for that person from time to time.

What I suggested for the threat of nuclear war, in a set of lectures that I gave on the art of coercion which focused on different contexts of bargaining, was suggested first by the fact that nuclear threats had been proposed by Dulles on the one hand as the basis for our foreign policy, what he called brinkmanship, the willingness to go up to the brink of nuclear war but not get beyond it, to make threats which implicitly might even be bluffs or would be bluffs but which had enough credibility to be powerful, and he felt that in the modern context where we faced an enemy with greatly superior conventional forces, which was true in Russia or even China, that we could confront them only by threatening air power and specifically nuclear weapons, but facing an opponent that had nuclear weapons, as in the case of the Soviet Union, or whose ally had nuclear weapons, as in the case of China, there was the problem of making any such threat credible at all since it invoked the possibility, as Dean Acheson put it, of experiencing massive retaliation by the other side if we carried out our threat. Dulles implied or said that Eisenhower had made threats in connection in Korea in 1953 and that that had been the basis for achieving an armistice, and he implied that this had occurred in Quemoy as well, in the Quemoy crisis of '54; the Quemoy crisis of '58 still lay ahead and did indeed involve nuclear threats again.

The basic nuclear threat was of our first use of nuclear weapons in NATO and as a defense of West Europe against the larger, more capable forces of the Soviet Union and its West Warsaw Pact allies in East Europe. And the nuclear threat was seen on the one hand as the only possibility for stopping the Soviet offensive and 9:01 "roozing" it, and on the other hand had the advantage of being a uniquely American contribution, the defense of Europe, which guaranteed us a major voice in the affairs of Europe. But how to make it credible when the Soviets had increasingly short-range and medium-range planes and missiles with which to retaliate to any use of nuclear weapons in a way that would make a wasteland of Europe?

What came of these two strands of bargaining theory that were mingling in my mind was on the one hand that a threat did not have to be wholly credible in order to be effective. In other words, it did not have to be certain that it would be carried out in the event that an agreement was not reached for it to have a major effect on the agreement or on inducing, on the terms of an agreement. This is in contrast to a common statement about bargaining, that for a threat to be effective, one must be sure to be able to carry it out. That was especially not true with a nuclear threat where what was threatened was so horrific that even a small possibility that it might be carried out would be enough to be very influential.

On the other hand, the possibility of a nuclear response was so horrific that it was hard to make even a small possibility credible. It's hard to achieve in the opponent's mind reliably the expectation or the prospect that there was even a small chance that it might be carried out.

And I said there were two distinguishable ways really in which you might achieve this small level of credibility that was all that was needed, what I called a critical risk at that time, a probability above which if you could achieve it in the mind of the opponent, you would win; your threat would be effective and the other side would comply.

One was embodied in a lecture that I described as "The Political Uses of Madness," taking as a model of what could be done and what had been done Hitler's use in diplomacy or negotiation of his own reputation for fanatic or erratic or impulsive or even crazy behavior. He was known as a rug chewer, a "Teppichfresser," somebody who would virtually fall to the floor and chew the carpets in a frenzy. I don't know if he ever actually did that, but that was the image that people had of him in their mind, whether he would froth at the mouth in his rage that he would develop in the course of a confrontation.

Now it was the case that he did meet people in his office sometimes and fly into a rage with them and a frenzy of what he was willing to do if his demands were not met, and then as soon as the guest, the diplomat, had left the room, he would turn to his aides very calmly and say, "How did that go?" or "Did I—", you know, that much (laughs), "Did I scare him?," that sort of thing, indicating that it had been very much of an act. He certainly was capable of being totally lucid and charming and insightful in

conversations and evoking, partly on that basis, great loyalty among aides who served him, and admiration, and a good impression in many cases on people who dealt with him, foreigners.

At the same time there was of course a strain of a different kind of madness in his real willingness to take very great risks that scared the hell out of his generals often and of other people around him, but in which instances he won the confrontation time after time, making it very difficult for them to combat him, really, because they had been wrong in the past when he had said that the other side would back down and they hadn't believed it. So he was certainly a gambler, and of a sort that almost has not been seen at the head of a major state before or since, his willingness to take what even he perceived were great risks, and on the other hand his tendency to see that things that other people saw as very great risks were not as dangerous as they thought was also true in the '30s, and they overestimated the willingness of the Allies to stand up to him, his party. So there was a combination of insight which of course eventually led him to a kind of hubris, a belief in his own powers of intuition and foresight that was overestimated and of course led him eventually to the invasion of Russia, which was his downfall. But up till that, it was represented by a whole string of victories, both diplomatic and military.

Now, my point simply was that this image that he cultivated and which had some basis, for being an unpredictable and impulsive party, actor, and also, and this was certainly true, for having priorities that were so extreme as to be called a kind of madness—obviously his priority for eliminating the Jewish presence in the German occupied areas, Germany and the occupied areas, was an idiosyncratic, you know, priority that was—

TR: But again, going back to the relationship between the threats and your...

DE: Yeah, okay. Well, but this is important. His willingness to use extreme measures, like actually exterminating the Jews, was of course a kind of madness in himself, which hardly anyone perceived, really, outside earlier, but in which he carried through till his last days of his suicide, because his willingness to risk ultimate disaster for Germany was again so extreme a priority.

Remember that in economics, there is almost a postulate that one accepts a coherent set of preferences and priorities as a basis for rational action, whatever they are, and there is no critique within economics really of extreme, extraordinary desires or priorities, so that what can be called evil or crazy aims are as much a basis for subsequently rational choices of instruments and actions to achieve those priorities is regarded by economics as rational, period. As beyond criticism. Well, still this did carry towards Hitler.

So I was saying that in the hands then of a Hitler who could successfully convey that he was capable of carrying out even a suicidal action *and* one that was massively homicidal, mass murder, was not only

advantageous, it was almost necessary, if you were to present the carrying out of the threat as a deliberate action, because only a madman could do that.

Now there was another way of conveying a threat of such enormous magnitude, both in its effect on other people, its murderousness, and its suicidal characteristic, the risks that it posed for yourself, your own country, and that was to convey or to some extent let it be true that the process was to some degree outside your control, that under some circumstances the rational actor at the center of this decision-making would not be able to refrain from carrying out the threat because it was out of his control. It would have its own momentum, let's say, or some other actor might choose to push the button.

And in fact this approach became a reality in the degree to which nuclear weapons were dispersed to front lines, small nuclear weapons in Europe in particular, and when you delegate power, obviously it's outside and arrangements are made that you can't physically or electronically control the decisions that are made by these representatives. It becomes clear that under certain circumstances the buttons might be pushed, even though that was against the wishes of the president, secretary general or whoever, the commander in chief, and Tom Schelling in particular emphasized this aspect of things in his work, "The Threat That Leaves Something to Chance," actually producing a mechanism which actually makes the decision in the end to some degree random and outside your own control, and that again can make it plausible that it will actually be carried out. Of course, it means also that there is almost surely a chance for false alarm, that it will be carried out under circumstances where you really don't intend for it to be done.

I found of course in the Pacific that to almost an amazing degree, and not probably for this very purpose, events that the control of nuclear weapons was shockingly loose in many ways. There not only was a formal delegation of authority to theater commanders, which was contrary to repeated statements by the president, but they in turn had delegated it to other commanders below them, *and* precautions that had been taken to make sure that the weapons would not be launched without higher authority were often ignored and bypassed and safety measures were inoperative or not reliable, so that there was a much higher chance, actually, that nuclear war would, weapons would be launched without the desire either of the president or even of the commander in chief in the Pacific, was definitely not zero, and much higher than almost anybody imagined. And that was almost surely true in the European area as well, where the immediate threat was made on NATO.

Now, we talked the other day of the measures that were taken to suggest that we believed that the U.S. would have a rational basis for escalating or for carrying out a threat in some confidence that there would not be a nuclear response by Russia or in support of its allies or its clients, and that was basically on the notion that we would create the ability to limit damage for us by a disarming attack if we faced use of nuclear weapons against our own forces or against our ally, and we would then proceed to disarm them to a

degree that would at least make it possibly rational on our part to do that rather than to risk a first strike or an escalation by the other side, but those measures were actually almost approached rationality from the point of view of U.S. casualties in the '50s, when there was very little chance. They did rely on a somewhat insane neglect of the ability of the Soviets to retaliate against our European allies, who were much closer to them, and they could use short-range and intermediate-range vehicles against them. But we did in fact have that kind of madness pretty much. We didn't take it into account. And—okay.

So when I was doing these lectures in 1959, I was proposing the political uses of madness not as something that could be advantageous or optimal for the U.S., but rather I could hardly imagine at that time our own leaders deliberately accepting either the appearance or the reality of insane, crazy decision-making. But I could see it in terms of Russia having, as a Cold Warrior, which I saw in terms of Hitlerian approach—and Khrushchev seemed to be inheriting that mantle deliberately, not by appearing crazy but by the threats he was making against England in the Suez crisis and against Cuba in 1961, and in connection with Berlin, his willingness to threaten nuclear weapons, even if he had been superior, as we supposed part of the time, had an air, had the same sound as Hitler's threats.

TR: "The missiles will fly automatically."

DE: What?

TR: "Our rockets will fly..."

DE: Yeah, "will fly automatically." And had the same—which, by the way, to say "our rockets will fly automatically" is posing the threat of being out of control...

TR: Right.

DE: ...of having an automaticity built in, that it's not a rational decision. And, but they had the same ring.

TR: Right.

DE: And my actual thought at the time was not that Khrushchev was Hitler in his aggressiveness or his expansionist aspect or in being mad, but that if he were tempted by superiority and our own vulnerability to adopt an appearance or reality of madness, that he might do so; that it was important for us to prevent him from having a motivation to think that he might succeed if he were sufficiently mad. And so the objective of my mentor, Wohlstetter, at the time, and of other people at Rand and of myself was to make it unthinkable or impossible for someone who was sane, for a rational choice, to make it appear that going

first against us might be better than waiting and possibly going second. We wanted to make it in no circumstances would it appear a rational...

TR: Right.

DE: Choice. And Wohlstetter's thesis in the "The Delicate Balance of Terror" and in his earlier classified work, "The Delicate Balance" being his *Foreign Affairs* article in 1960, the warning that he made was that under some circumstances...

TR: Of vulnerability.

DE: ...a Russian attack might actually be a rational choice. Now, actually the realities did not bear this out at all at the time, but that's what he warned and that's what we believed at the time, that there were circumstances in which it might look better for the Russians to go first than otherwise and that that must be changed so as to make it only the act of a madman.

TR: But so in a lot of ways, the whole notion about political uses of madness and stuff like that also overlaps with notions of strategic stability versus strategic instability.

DE: Yeah. Yes. Well, I'll come to that now.

So, the idea of strategic instability was largely that you had a situation where it actually could appear for one side or the other, or perhaps for both, advantageous in some circumstances, or less bad, to launch an attack than not to launch an attack, where the latter is to wait for a possible attack or a loss, a defeat in a regional conflict, it might appear, and that was unstable in the sense that if that appearance emerged, if those circumstances emerged, the world would blow up.

TR: Yeah.

DE: And so you want to make it clear that in no circumstances would that arise.

Now, uh... how are we doing on time here? Are we getting t... okay.

TR:

DE: By the late '60s, the Russians had in fact built up to the point where either for us to preempt or to go first or to escalate was, looked like an act of madness...

TR: Yeah.

DE: ...or for the Russians to do so. For either side to do so. In other words, we had now achieved a situation where both sides had forces that were largely invulnerable. They could be reduced by the other side's attack, but only to a point that would leave residual forces that could still devastate the other, and that should have been seen, or could have been seen as very stable, and making it really an unnecessary, wasteful, foolish investment even to spend more time in trying to reduce damage because it could only be reduced to totally catastrophic levels. So...

TR: So...

DE: But, let me... So what we didn't know at the time was that Nixon actually had what he called, as he said to his aide, H.R. Haldeman, his madman theory, which was that he could appear mad enough to carry out these threats.

TR: By the way, just to back up, I mean, so you talk about strategic stability, but then if you look at different decisions on the arms race like the decision to MIRV, for example...

DE: Yeah.

TR: ...then what you're doing again, even though you could argue that you still have a certain level of strategic stability because of the residual forces, but this effort to go with weapons that are counterforce and target more and more and threaten elements of the Soviet system at least gives you the appearance of a nonincredible threat to escalate, right?

DE: Right. Right. The perception...

First, I would say, from what I have read of the studies of our nuclear war planning and calculations underlying them, in the last, well, I'd say my own direct connection with them ended certainly at the latest in '64. I didn't stay current very much, just very periphery till I left Rand in '70, but my real direct connection was '63, '64, so that's a long time ago. But since then, these plans have become known to large numbers of civilians, which was not true then, and researchers, and a good deal has been published on them indicating that the general nature and the reasoning that lies under them has stayed pretty amazingly the same over all this period, very familiar to me, and a characteristic of that throughout has been the belief that it was efficacious and worthwhile, even at very great expense, to pursue the military physical capability to destroy the other side's military system, even when throughout that period since the late '60s it's been clear

that there would remain a very large residual force after these efforts, almost surely always with the possibility that there would be a kind of a paralysis, but with that as being a rather remote possibility.

There's an analogy that's always struck me—this is a kind of military thinking, or military bureaucracy thinking, or military-industrial complex thinking, that has its own irrationality built in, and the analogy was this. During the Vietnam War there was a question which I studied for McNamara in the spring of 1965 of whether it was worthwhile to close Haiphong, the port of Haiphong, by mining it, bombing it and mining it, and it was true that most materiel from Russia was coming in, in the way of SAM, surface-to-air, missiles and others, through the port of Haiphong. It would I think mostly go to China and then be transshipped from China to Vietnam through the port of Haiphong, so the military were very keen on closing Haiphong, which seemed rational in itself until you really investigated whether there were alternative ways of getting the materiel in through from China without Haiphong. And the intelligence group that went to work under me and under an intelligence colonel who was very good technically and I supervised the effort, was that, first of all, the materiel that was coming in amounted on an average basis only to a few truckloads a day, sometimes one truckload a day, but a few truckloads altogether a day, and on the other hand, there were enormous networks of roads and rivers from China into Vietnam with a capacity, you know, of thousands of tons a day rather than tens, many thousands. So it seemed absolutely clear that if you closed Haiphong, which was the easiest route for them to use, they could easily bring all that they needed down from China. And moreover, not only could you not do it—this was more important—you could not only not do that, close that off by hitting Haiphong, you couldn't close it off by any amount of air effort because the rivers and roads there were such that you could not stop them from getting this relatively small amount in daily.

The military attitude throughout was, nevertheless it is now coming in through Haiphong and we want to close *that*. Now, there were real costs and risks to doing that because there were Russian ships in the harbor at Haiphong all the time.

TR: What's the analogy?

DE: What?

TR: What's the analogy?

DE: Oh. The analogy is, their attitude always was, we don't care that they can do it anyway by other means, what they're doing it now is this way and we want to stop that, and it's worth doing. And the trouble there being that that could have gotten you into war immediately with China and Russia, so there was a considerable downside to that.

But they thought, well, we'll do *that*, you know, that's something we can take care of.

Well, likewise, if there were targets in Russia, you know, in the Soviet Union, that you could destroy, the argument that there would be lots of others left that you couldn't destroy did not impress the military so much. They said let's at least get what we can destroy and we'll let the other take care of itself somehow. Now, remember, if you preempted against those targets, you were ensuring that you would experience attacks from the others. So there was a great downside there to doing that if it weren't going to happen already.

Supposing the other side was in the process of attacking first. Then you would say, all right, by hitting these particular targets preemptively or in the course of the strike, you'll at least reduce what they can bring to bear altogether. But if you say, but the remaining part will nevertheless absolutely devastate our country, you could say, is that, you know, really worthwhile compared to other uses of the money we can be making or other efforts we could make to avoid the war altogether? And the military attitude was very much, let us at least plan to destroy what we can destroy, whatever else is left. And that seems to have prevailed ever since in developing, with greater accuracy and larger warheads and faster delivery and everything, a capability, even though there has been a steadily, you know, a very great residual force left. And enough to devastate us totally. Moreover, the efforts to do this very clearly stimulated on the other side a countereffort to assure that they would have a very great residual force, so it increased the arms race on both sides.

Now, there always was one possibility here that would change that picture, and that was that by destruction of the command and control network, the decapitation, you might keep the other side from using its residual force and at least delay it so that you could get over there with your fast missiles and your accurate missiles and destroy them on the ground.

TR: Was the Soviet sub situation the same as that of the U.S.?

DE: What's that?

TR: Do we know about the Soviet submarine situation... 37:48 ____ [crosstalk]

DE: Yeah, well, meanwhile they were building up their submarines, but we were building up our anti-submarine capability greatly.

TR: I mean, did they also not have, I assume they also didn't have physical locks on their submarine-based missiles?

DE: They didn't have what?

TR: I'm assuming they didn't have physical locks on their missiles, like...

DE: Didn't have—?

TR: Physical locks.

DE: Oh, no. No. So—where were we? Oh. So they, for instance, had their submarine force, but we were developing anti-submarine capabilities. They had nothing comparable to that. But enormous arrays of sensors on the floor of the sea and elsewhere to track them, and great attack submarines on our part.

Now, it has to be kept in mind, why, why was this what seemed like essentially irrational? Keep in mind that when you destroy their capabilities, even including their command and control, you are presumably reducing the total weight that they can bring against you, even though at the same time you may be destroying their ability to hold it back or to surrender.

TR: Right right right.

DE: And you're also stimulating them to increase their overall capabilities in peacetime in order to prepare for this and increasing the possibility of a false alarm effort on their part, knowing that they may be attacked and their use-it-or-lose-it philosophy, which again is not entirely rational by any means because using it under those circumstances doesn't necessarily carry any advantages other than simple revenge, which is in fact a very powerful human motivation.

TR: (laughs)

DE: Even when it brings the world down.

TR: 39:46 ____

DE: Now, however, so it was always true, Herman Kahn used to distinguish very much between levels of catastrophe, you know, and very much impressed, even in terms of numbers, you know, isn't there a difference? Can one ignore the difference between losing 200 million people and losing only 100 million people? Well, he says it's a difference of 100 million people, that surely is worthwhile. And yet other people had a tendency to, say, be uneasy about that.

TR: (laughs)

DE: But the question is if it's hard to argue that it's not worthwhile at all, and the question is what risks you should take or what costs you should pay in order to achieve one level rather than the other.

So, here's the thing. Given this tendency on the part of the military, which can be perceived in the Russian side as well, their desire to be able to destroy that part of our force which they could target, which is largely our land-based missiles and our command and control, they developed, they definitely would, just as we did, in part because they seemed I think simply to be imitating us. You know, if the U.S. thinks this is worthwhile and values it, we're going to show them that we have the same capability and we're going to get the same capability. So a desire for parity that didn't have a real basis in improvement in the postwar situation.

But, given that each side can see that the other calculates and acts that way, it's a certain plausibility, credibility, after all, to believing that in some circumstances they would use that counterforce capability that they have bought. Someone else, an outsider, might look at that and say, that doesn't achieve anything. But the fact that you spent a great deal of money developing it suggests that you believe that it will be of some benefit and that you might actually use it, and that means then that each side is facing in the other a capability that might actually be used, whether it seemed rational or not.

TR: A winnable a nuclear war...

DE: What?

TR: A winnable nuclear war.

DE: A winna—yes. The winnable nuclear war. And others might say, but the war won't really be won, but they seem to be acting as if they thought that it could be won. And that means they might actually engage in it. So there is a reason for buying it, just to evoke that fear on the other side that they must step carefully lest they trigger this on your own side.

Now, let me get to the specifics, though, of where this led to with Nixon. We know from Haldeman and others now that Nixon in '68, facing a situation which seemed to be thoroughly stalemated in Vietnam, and was in fact thoroughly stalemated, thought that he could break through that stalemate with threats of destruction that went beyond anything that Johnson had been willing to carry out and that that would get him a very specific concession by the other side, not a total surrender, not a standing down of the NLF or the North Vietnamese forces in...

TR: A mutual withdrawal.

DE: Yeah. But mutual withdrawal.

TR: (laughs)

DE: That he was willing to take U.S. ground troops out, leaving, however, U.S. air support for the ARVN, for our Vietnamese forces, but he wanted that accompanied by a withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces and perhaps even the forces that had come south in the late '50s. So, and that would make the resulting conflict, which might continue indefinitely, manageable by the ARVN forces alone without U.S. ground forces but with U.S. air support. So, it was not a recipe, it did not aim at ending the war, but in making the war sustainable on a cost basis with almost no U.S. casualties, lower U.S. money...

TR: Deescalating stalemate.

DE: What?

TR: Deescalating...

DE: Yeah, well, down to a low level of a stalemate that was sustainable indefinitely, and which is I think what in effect we're aiming at in Afghanistan right now. In theory, a war that can be handled by Afghan forces with presumably continued U.S. drones and cruise missiles supporting them.

So—where are we on—I don't seem to have my watch here. Where we are on time?

TR: It's about 11.

DE: What?

TR: It's about 11.

DE: It's 11?

TR: Yeah.

DE: Oh, dear. Well, okay. The next 10 minutes now, let me bring this to a head.

In this context, you know, it occurs to me for the first time as I say this, there could have been a connection between this Vietnam strategy, which after all was not understood by almost anybody outside the White House at that time, and the decision to go ahead with MIRV, which was very clearly a decision which

could at best gain us a kind of advantage for a few years until the Soviets also MIRV, and that was the advice of, I forget, two of the top advisers that he had then, arms control people.

TR: Paul Doty.

DE: What?

TR: Paul Doty?

DE: No. I think that Costa Tsipras may have been involved, but anyway there were two high-level advisers who said, they're going to MIRV too and if we don't stop this, both sides will have greatly increased their number of missiles.

TR: George Rathchins.

DE: What?

TR: George Rathchins.

DE: Rathchins was one, yes. George Rathchins. And, uh... Rathchins and somebody. Might have been Tsipras. And that was very, very obvious.

TR: Yes.

DE: It seemed, again, a kind of irrational move. Keep in mind that every one of these moves involves profits for the aircraft industry.

TR: Right.

DE: And the logic I think of every one of them would never have been as compelling if there were not profits and votes and jobs involved in doing this, but it may well have been that precisely in those few years was a time when Nixon did want to pose a significant advantage in terms of numbers of warheads and counterforce capability to the Soviets, knowing now that he proposed to try to win in Vietnam effectively by nuclear threats.

So, let me go over some stuff here quite fast. I discussed options with Nixon, I should say with Kissinger, rather, in December of '68 and early January '69, and someone at Rand had said, "Now, in all these

options, shouldn't we have a nuclear weapons possible?" I had said then, "I will not be associated with a study that even suggests the possible legitimacy, or, you know, usefulness of using nuclear weapons." I had great misgivings about doing this study from the first part at all because I said this is staff work for the White House in a situation where by now we shouldn't be telling him he has options to extrication. The only real option he has is to get out of there. At least that's the only one I want to be associated with. But I was persuaded that if we took on this study, I at least could assure that the option of extrication was included and given a fair hearing, and in terms of costs and benefits. And so that did seem logical, although (laughs) in the end, the option of extrication in the final version out of my hands was removed and was not presented to the National Security Council. So, in fact I was thinking of this just the other day. It occurred to me, they could just as well have included the nuclear option, you know, after I had got off it. I was sent on to another project. It was finished by Freddie Clay, and actually the final product was more changed than I realized until I looked at it just a few years ago. I thought it was just a slight re-editing of mine, but actually there was more of a change than I had realized. And he could have put in a nuclear option, and there I would be having participated in this thing. But I didn't.

And in discussing the options with Kissinger, who brought in Schelling—and I didn't realize at that time that Schelling was Kissinger's main remaining academic friend actually. Just by his personality and other ways he had lost most of his friends in Harvard and the academy, but Schelling did remain, until at least Cambodia, a real friend, and I think they probably resumed later again after some years, after Schelling left being a consultant at the time of Cambodia.

But in the course of this, Schelling raised two questions. One was, "You don't have a threat option." And I was rather abashed at that, because logically that was true, and here he and I were the great exponents of threat theory and he was challenging me that I had omitted it. And I said, "Well, you're right. I can put that in as an option." And I did say, "I don't see how a threat strategy has any promise because we've been carrying out the bombing for years now and it had no effect, and I don't see why threatening more of it will have any effect, but I can put it in as a formal alternative." What Kissinger did not reveal then was that Nixon had already formulated the idea of making a much greater threat, specifically a nuclear threat, than had ever been made before, and going beyond the Democrats before him, but that didn't come up. And Schelling says he didn't know that, I've asked him more recently, that he was not aware of that in Kissinger's mind.

Second, Schelling said, "You don't have a win strategy. You know, it seems to me, even if you think it's too costly or too risky or not appropriate, you should at least present the president with an option that would win, you know, in some fashion." And I said, "I don't believe there is a win strategy." And I said, you could put in a million troops, which the JCS had already contemplated, and we had at that time 550,000, so you can double the number of troops, and I said that will keep the place quiet relatively so long

as they're there, but when they leave you'll be in the same situation, *or*, I said, you could destroy the population with nuclear weapons, but I wouldn't call that a win. Well, behind that exchange, it later turned out, was Nixon's thought that precisely by threatening nuclear weapons, the combination of threat and the idea of nuclear weapons was exactly what he had in mind for what would amount to a successful win strategy.

TR: 52:32 ____

DE: Yeah. But—

TR: Eisenhower's threat...

DE: Yeah, but now, how to make it plausible. And it turns out that he saw it precisely in terms of what he called his madman theory. Now some have, since I had actually given the lecture "The Political Uses of Madness" to Henry Kissinger's seminar at Harvard in 1959, and he had later described this in 1970 to Lloyd Shearer, said that he had "learned more from Dan Ellsberg on the subject of bargaining than from any other person." And I at first didn't know what he was talking about and then realized he was talking about my lecture, "The Political Uses of Madness." I gave two lectures and that was one of them. The other was I think "The Theory and Practice of Blackmail." So I realized that here in 1970...

TR: What was the third lecture then, "Presidents as Perfect Detonators"?

DE: What?

TR: Wasn't there a third one? "Presidents..."

DE: Oh, I had a number of lectures, but I gave only two of them to his seminar.

TR: Oh!

DE: Repeated to him. I had about six or seven lectures that year. But, so I realized in 1970 that he was referring to my lecture on "The Political Uses of Madness" back in 1959, which was 11 years earlier. So I said, "You have a very good memory." And he said, "Well, they were really good lectures." But my second thought was, of course, that what the content, what he was thinking of here in the White House—we were at that moment in San Clemente, the Western White House—was a lecture on Hitler's..., and that is that that had stuck in his mind as to how these threats could be effective.

And sometimes it's been said that I was proposing this strategy. That was never true, that I proposed it. It was obviously a very dangerous strategy, as it was for Hitler, and it was effective but dangerous, and it was at the service of a leader who was both extremely ambitious in his expansionism, extremely aggressive, and extremely reckless as a gambler, not qualities that I ever expected to see in an American president, or wanted to see. So I took offense at the idea that I'd ever proposed that, as opposed to describing it as a policy that might work for an opponent and should therefore be expected and countered, and we should be prepared to confront that and challenge it and make sure that at least that it would be an act of madness for somebody to carry this out.

And then others have inferred that Nixon actually got his madman strategy from me via Kissinger, and that actually did seem possible to me for a while after Harrison Salisbury made that a point of his book *Without Fear or Favor*. He just inferred it. And it seemed possible that could have been the case till I realized that Nixon was proposing this, according to Haldeman, in the summer of 1968 during the campaign, or the spring actually of '68, which was well before he had virtually any dealings with Kissinger at all. Kissinger was working for Rockefeller at that point and as far as I know hadn't even met Nixon until he was actually offered the job of national security assistant, and he had actually used the words "madman theory" to Haldeman before, so he didn't get it from me, I'm glad to say (laughs), even as a concept. I would prefer not to have to take credit for that.

TR: Time, time 56:29 ____ we go.

DE: What time is it?

TR: 11:08.

DE: Okay, no, we have a couple more minutes here. So, Nixon's point, of course, reflected this aspect of nuclear bargaining, which was true in particular ever since a kind of stability was achieved, a mutual deterrence was achieved, where each side had a significant capability either to retaliate or for that matter to preempt. That was a situation which people imagined to have come about almost as soon as the Russians had nuclear weapons in '49, '50, but in fact they were so far behind us that we had a significant kind of superiority with respect to U.S. casualties right until the early '60s, and that was not so true with respect to European casualties, but if we were prepared to ignore those, that superiority remained. Which is, you know, a kind of madness that I think people could hardly conceive and yet seemed to be a reality.

So, I mean, you take, uh, well...

RECORDING CUTS OFF